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ABSTRACT

Adults, whatever their competence, are not obsolete. Education for adults is the font we must draw on to make possible the new environment in education that we call lifetime learning and recurrent education. Following the lead of Europe in planning broad-based adult education programs, the United States has begun to fund and operate diversified programs. The Adult Education Division of the Office of Education, in a recent study, has identified the minimal needs in all literacy areas for an American adult. Acknowledging that the average reading and computational ability of adults was found to be at the five-year level, we must begin to address the special problems of the functionally undereducated. We must understand the adult student's goals, supply the basic tools within the specific work and cultural setting, and create habits of life-long learning. If we are to make life-long learning and recurrent education more than a token, American education institutions must become open-ended, built around competency based modules or units of learning. We must include coping skills as well as job skills, the humanities as well as vocational training. All facets of learning are necessary to make the whole person and the whole life. (Author/MH)

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ADULT EDUCATION--ANOTHER NAME FOR LIFETIME LEARNING*

T. H. Bell
U.S. Commissioner of Education

Greetings to you, my colleagues in education from all over the world.

A remark of H. G. Wells seems appropriate as we meet here today to talk about adult education. Wells said "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

With the world in its present seeming disarray, many persons think that adults today are already obsolete--"over the hill," to use a bit of American slang--that we will never get education to any of them fast enough to prevent that catastrophe Wells forecast many years ago, and that therefore we had better concentrate on reaching the 3 to 6-year olds.

This sort of thinking has been current for some time, but the personal conviction I bring to you today is that adults, whatever their competence, are not obsolete. Moreover, education for adults is the font we must draw on to make possible the new environment in education that we call lifetime learning and recurrent education.

A great deal of adult education is going on around the world right now, and yet when most Americans speak of education they are talking about education of youngsters. After all, the amount of money spent by the U.S. Government on basic education for adults--$308 million--is just a token compared to the overall sum of $9.6 billion that it spends for all education. Education for under-educated adults has just not communicated itself as the priority that it surely is for both individual and national development. Adult education has gone quietly and un-

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assumingly about its work in the U.S.A., almost asking to be ignored, but we are determined to make it speak louder, speak up for itself.

The need for adult education to make itself heard developed from the Third International Conference on Adult Education in Tokyo in 1972. There, after hearing about a landmark program instituted in Thailand, the delegates saw clearly that good ideas needed to be spread around. This conference is the result. It is my strong hope that all 21 countries represented here will be able to see their best programs adapted and adopted throughout the world. There is no room for chauvinism on a small planet where people are crying out for help.

Europe has long been ahead of the United States in planning broad-based adult education. In a 1971 report to the U.S. Office of Education, Dr. William W. Brickman said:

> A study which covered Belgium, West Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom showed. . . patterns of collaboration (between various components in technical education) such as vocational schools with industrial plants and workshop-schools established within firms and drawing upon outside teachers for general education.

"In point of actual fact," Dr. Brickman went on, "there is a concensus among informed persons that the problems of industrial training can only be solved through some kind of partnership between educationists, employers, employees, and public authorities."

Further on in the same report, Dr. Brickman referred to patterns of collaboration between humanistic and technical education as shown through a study of the same countries.

Here in the U.S.A. some of the same moves are taking place, but much more must be done. This conference, then, is a chance to spread ideas where they are most needed.

Adult education, as defined and funded by the Office of Education, means organized educational activities engaged in by persons over 16 years of age who are outside traditional full-time education systems. The Office of Education funds and operates the only program of basic education in reading, writing, and computation that is based solely on educational criteria.

Other U.S. Government agencies fund basic or job-related adult education, among them the Veterans Administration, the Manpower Administration of the Department of Labor, the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Department of the Interior, and the Bureau of Prisons of the Department of Justice.

But all these agencies set up special criteria, largely non-educational. That is, Bureau of Prisons programs are directed to Federal prisoners, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' programs serve Indians, Veterans Administration programs serve military veterans.

Of the total Federal funding of $308 million for adult basic, high school equivalency, and job-related remedial education in the Fiscal Year 1974, just $79.3 million went to programs based exclusively on educational criteria. Among other programs, veterans, for example, received more than $150 million, but this included subsistence pay not directly related to education.

The $79.8 million went to the Adult Education Division of the Office of Education, along with responsibility for some 54.3 million adults in the United States who do not have a high school diploma. I do not mean

to say that possession of a diploma is a sure guide to individual literacy. Literacy in a country of many subcultures and technologies, like the United States, means possession of a set of basic skills common to the general culture. Nevertheless, a diploma does represent a measurable quantity of education and is a convenient reference point.

A new research report to be released by the Adult Education Division in a few months has identified the ground level of literacy required of an adult in the United States. The list starts with the communications skills--reading, writing, speaking, listening. It includes computation, problem solving, and facility in interpersonal relations. Add to this a general occupation related knowledge and a knowledge of consumer economics, community resources, government and law, and health.

Obviously, all these areas allow for wide variation in degree of knowledge and competence. When the full report is available, the minimal needs in all literacy areas for an American adult will be made known. Meanwhile, a few initial findings may point up the kind of deficiencies we are dealing with here in the United States. For instance:

---Only 56 percent of the sample of 1,500 persons was able to match personal qualifications to job requirements when shown a series of newspaper "help wanted" advertisements.

---Given a monthly earnings statement showing gross salary, deductions, and net salary, only 74 percent of the sample was able to determine the total amount of deductions for taxes, Social Security, etc. Moreover, 33 percent of the sample--which would project to some 39 million persons in the total U.S. population--could not locate the deduction for Social Security on the earnings statement.

---One fifth of the sample could not read an "equal opportunity" notice well enough to understand that the employer publishing the notice did not discriminate among job applicants because of race, national origin, or sex.

---Thirty-six percent of the sample, given an income tax form and information concerning dependents, was unable to read, write, or compute well enough to enter the correct number of exemptions in the appropriate block.

In another recent study of adults, although average school completion was listed as 10.5 years, the average reading and computation ability was found to be at the 5-year level.

The people on the bottom must be our first consideration, and we are engaged in studies to help us find out where these people are and how to reach them. For, if they cannot cope now, the next decades will find them lower and lower on the survival scale, and with them their families.

Few of us here know all the special problems of the functionally under-educated. Unless we can put our imagination to this task, we will never be able to lift up those submerged millions into a full realization of what it means to be a free and independent citizen.

To begin with, the under-educated need teachers as mentors who will build their confidence. Knowledge and mastery will carry confidence along, but those who cannot read or communicate need to feel the excitement of learning. Even before achievement captures them, they need to feel that they <u>can</u> learn, that they are not too old, that their success matters to someone else, that it is not a matter just of being able to earn more dollars, marks, or yen per week, but of living a larger life.

We must remind ourselves of how it must feel to be, say, 25 years old and unable to fill out a work application, to open a savings account, to read the instructions on how to use or care for a new electrical appliance, to read a map or street sign to get from one part of the city to another in order to look for a job.

We must remind ourselves that this would feel terrible.

Yet we must remember that, in spite of poor skills, the under-educated person may have rich dreams and must have counseling to preserve them and help build toward their realization.

The goals of the under-educated--whether we are talking about the true functionally illiterate or the newcomer to our shores who must learn our language--must be understood, and the basic tools to meet them must be supplied within the specific work or cultural setting. But that is not enough, either. Through the non-formal training that is lifetime learning and recurrent education we must also picture for each adult learner a new horizon of the possible--of what is possible for him or her.

The habits that start with, perhaps, language instruction in a factory classroom must carry on throughout life. Perhaps next year it will be a course in consumer economics conducted in a union hall, the following year a course in photography in a civic center. The setting and the subject are not important as long as we establish growing patterns of adult education that stretch over everyone's lifetime.

At present one out of every three Americans not enrolled in formal schooling <u>is</u> enrolled in some form of adult education. We should like

to establish adult education as a regular part of a person's life--and of family life--so that everyone will feel equal to taking the next step up the growth ladder.

Since many young people are more attracted to the seeming freedom of work than they are to school during their adolescence, it would seem right to give them the opportunity to work, with the expectation that they will return to school as the spirit, and their needs, move them.

This concept of recurrent education was discussed at the International Labor Organization conference in Geneva in 1972, along with the idea of paid education leave and paid sabbaticals for workers.

The idea of paid leave has been supported by legislation in 58 out of 60 countries surveyed by the International Labor Organization, and had its beginnings in the United States under the authority of the Government Employees Training Act of 1958. That act has been the impetus for such programs as Project Stride and Upward Mobility College, which are sponsored by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Under certain circumstances, these programs allow employees time off with pay to pursue their studies.

This is a beginning. But, if they are to make life time learning and recurrent education more than a token, I believe that all American education institutions must become open-ended, built around competency based modules or units of learning. Under a plan like that, an adult without a high school diploma might nevertheless qualify for a university course in economics or Spanish literature or mathematics if he or she could show enough competency in the field. There is little sense in handcuffing a person for lack of credentials if motivation is strong. If we remove the

bureaucratic barriers to our education institutions, I think we will see some truly creative self-education taking place, of the sort that makes for leadership.

Adult education can be any form of self-motivated learning...and therein lies its difference. To change one's self and one's ways of doing and seeing needs only the fervent wish. That is the reason adults are much better as students than they were in their school years. They are doing what they want to do, frequently what is crucial to their development as knowledgeable citizens and as workers.

And here is another special attribute of adult education. One seems to grow faster, or is perhaps aware of faster growth, in adult study. Perhaps this happens because the adult has at least some of the equipment with which to recognize truths about himself.

The way in which the involvement of adults in learning reflects back on family life is well demonstrated by the classroom participation of groups of disadvantaged parents in two of several projects I know about. One is in the Granite School District in suburban Salt Lake City, Utah, where I served as superintendent before I became Commissioner. The other is in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Parents in both projects are taught elementary teaching skills and are paid as paraprofessional teacher aides to work with their own children along with others in the classroom. The mothers observe how children learn and start to develop the concept of their own home as a learning center. More important, participation in the schooling of their children leads the mothers back into adult education for their own development as well as for the welfare of their children.

The special problems of adult education, I am sure, lie as heavily on many of you as they do on our Adult Education Division. Special materials are not ordinarily designed for adult instruction, nor special standards set. Adult education classes are often taught in an old or borrowed classroom, or in a building normally given to some other purpose. Equipment is begged, borrowed, or somehow confiscated. Few teachers are trained specifically to teach adults; most are day school teachers seeking to earn extra money. Teachers and administrators have to be experts in obtaining--and holding on to--grants.

The Office of Education has spent $20 million for 125 grants with which to train teachers for a variety of adult needs--and has only skimmed the surface. Yet the eagerness and intensity with which adults tackle education once they get their feet wet, the satisfactory sense that adult students retain what they learn and are able to build upon it...these make up for the difficulties encountered in getting any program started.

Dissemination of successful programs and help with new ideas is a must. Factories, community centers, unions--all must have access to the best that we know about in the field.

We are encouraged that Congress this year gave us the legislative base from which to operate a Clearing House for Adult Education.

The law authorizing this clearing house says that "It shall collect and disseminate to the public information pertaining to the education of adults and adult education programs, together with ways of coordinating adult education programs with manpower and other education programs."

Among the products disseminated by the clearing house would be some of those discussed at this meeting, as well as some of those developed by certain exemplary programs of OE's Adult Education Division. These include:

...The New York Chinatown English Language Learning Center, which is open 7 days a week to help not only those newcomers who speak Chinese but those speaking some other Asian languages as well.

...A project of the Missouri Division of Mental Health that develops curriculum packages around the teaching of basic education skills to disadvantaged adults, and tests based on these curriculums. The packages and tests are disseminated to other projects along with in-service training plans.

...The Des Moines Family Learning Project, in which parents are motivated to develop their skills through training calculated to help them assist their children.

The home as a family learning center will be emphasized in all our plans for adult education and growth, since it is the logical setting for members of the family to gather confidence and encouragement from one another. Confidence in the ability to master ever-changing technology and the flexibility with which to meet new situations will be a constant challenge in the next decades.

It is my hope that the education communities of the world can all pull together on the idea of lifetime learning and recurrent education. In developing this environment we must include first of all, the coping skills, next the special skills for a satisfying job, and then--equally important--the opportunities to study the arts and humanities and the natural sciences...those fields that make for a whole person and a whole life.

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